DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 076 CS 505 413

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TITLE Sensual Surfaces and Stylistic Excess: The Pleasure and Politics of "Miami Vice."
PUB DATE May 86
NOTE 45p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (36th, Chicago, IL, May 22-26, 1986).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Capitalism; Characterization; *Communication (Thought Transfer); Cultural Influences; Literary Criticism; Marxism; Models; Political Attitudes; Social Theories; *Television
IDENTIFIERS *Miami Vice (Television Series); *Television Criticism

ABSTRACT

Using Jean Baudrillard's postmodernist theories, this paper analyzes how the television program, "Miami Vice," operationalizes his theory through its attention to surfaces and style. The paper notes that Baudrillard proposes life as a surface comprised of animated models indistinguishable from the reality these models represent and asserts that, in much the same way, south Florida and "Miami Vice" have become indistinguishable from one another. "The CBS Morning News" and features in "The Miami Herald" are used as examples of how culture and "Miami Vice" have intermingled and life has become a hyperreal script of the television show. Other examples of hyperreal syntheses of the model and reality are the EPCOT model, the disco model, the condominium model, and the shopping mall model. The paper critiques certain aspects of "Miami Vice," such as its subordination of substance to style and actor Don Johnson's physique as a cipher of style. Finally, the postmodern indulgence in pleasure is related to its emphasis on surface and style. A five-page bibliography concludes the document. (SRT)

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Sensual Surfaces and Stylistic Excess: The Pleasure and Politics of *Miami Vice*

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Reid: "Uh, gee, Cath. I guess I'm just superficial."

Me: "Gee, Reid. When did that become a value?"

—— dialogue with an ex-boyfriend, Spring, 1985

BAUDRILLARDIAN SURFACES: CHATTING WITH COMMODITIES

In Capital, Karl Marx (1974) uses the metaphor of ventriloquism to characterize the insular discourse of commodities (p. 83). Animated like ventriloquists' dummies, the commodities speak honestly of their exchange value but when they speak through the mouth of the economist, value is articulated as an innate property. Although here Marx is making a case for the acquisition of value realized in the social process of exchange, he has also provided us with a most provocative metaphor for the postmodern conception of commodity culture.

Now, those ventriloquist-dummy commodities have come to define the contemporary social/cultural sphere, animating even the ventriloquist-economist who was supposed to be the subject or the reference point of the articulation. While for Marx, the ventriloquist-economist provides those undisciplined, chatty commodities with an alibi, today the alibi no longer exists and it is no longer possible to distinguish the dummies from the ventriloquist or the commodities from the economist who once spoke in their behalf. This annihilation of the subject, and ultimately the "real," is part of the postmodern condition.

It would be difficult here to describe and explain the various theoretical nuances, practices, and strategies of resistance informing Postmodernism.[1] For me, the term functions as a multi-disciplinary academic category which has been

defined by the post-structuralist, deconstructive practices of Continental theorists such as Michel Foucault (1979, 1980), Jacques Derrida (1976), and Deleuze and Guattari (1983) whose aim has been, in very different ways, to challenge the stable notion of representation and the transcendental conception of the subject--both romantic remnants of Modernism, which, in turn, has relied on the Western metaphysics of philosophical Idealism. The postmodern condition is symptomatic of those crises occurring on political, economic and ideological levels in the late 1950s and early '60s which altered and transformed our way of life. Indeed, the postmodern condition is especially terminal for the subject who, as French theorist Jean Baudrillard (1983a) states, is "living no longer as an actor or dramaturge, but as a terminal of multiple networks" (p. 128).

As a maverick voice for Postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard is perhaps best described as the punk-bricoleur of postmodernist theory. While his early work (e.g., For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, 1972) reveals traces of the structuralist social theory found in Lévi-Strauss, Mauss, and Barthes, The Frankfurt School remains a constant influence. As Charles Levin (1984) notes, "Baudrillard has not written a single thing which was not an attempt to elaborate a theory of reification à la Lukács, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse--with a strong dose of Benjamin" (p. 37). Baudrillard's attention to a terminal notion of commodification and reification also informs his critique of Marxism in its various structuralist and economistic permutations (The Mirror of Production, 1973). After dismissing Althusser and orthodox Marxism, Baudrillard's later work, which develops the notion of "simulation," must come to terms with traditional sociology (In The Shadow of the Silent Majorities, 1978), Lacan ("Beyond the Unconscious: The Symbolic," 1981), and Derrida and Foucault ("Forgetting Foucault," 1977).[2]

Baudrillard recognizes that theory itself is a reification. As a result,

his postmodern appropriations scandalize those devotees who reify certain theories. Nothing is sacred to Baudrillard,which makes his self-imposed marginalization both appealing and threatening. Indeed, he challenges dogma dogmatically. Consequently, each theorist Baudrillard draws from or addresses is either dismissed, shaken-up or radically re-written. For instance, in Baudrillard's hands, Foucaultian networks intersect, entrap and manipulate but lack any functional power strategies,i.e., any sense. For him, Derridean deconstruction may pulverize semiotic relations, but rather than flushing the particles down a spiralling void, they resurface as so many surfaces. This attention to surfaces in Baudrillard is condusive to a manic despair reminiscent of The Frankfurt School trapped in the 1980s without recourse to nostalgia or humanist optimism.

Baudrillard, more so than any other theorist, has been instrumental in liquidating all humanist assumptions residing in structuralism and even Foucaultian post-structuralism by proposing a postmodern, anti-structuralist theory of life as a reified surface. In many ways this is more a theory of living death than life, for this opaque impenetrable surface is comprised of animated models—the model is all. Marx's metaphorical dummy-commodity is no longer metaphorical; it speaks for everything. The subject is liquidated, representation surrenders to simulation, and the referent (the "real") is indistinguishable from the model. All referentials are neutralized and absorbed by the model. For Baudrillard (1983b), this reified postmodern surface-world populated by models is the affect of simulation, defined as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality" (p. 2).

'Miami Vice': The World as Commodity Catalogue

As, for instance, in the case of Miami Vice, South Florida as referent dissolves into Miami Vice the model. Thus Miami Vice is South Florida and vice versa. The media have capitalized on their own pyrrhic dissolution into the neon model which

lives in the headlines of The Miami Herald (Ray, 1986) as "Florida's Unwanted Export: Smugglers," and "Pot Profits Paid for a Fortress." Even public service messages meant to deter the public from drug usage speak as Miami Vice. For instance, the Cocaine Hotline warns of the dangers of Cocaine addiction in an advertisement (1986) which presents an alluring female model. The word "Seduction" is displayed prominently beneath her image. The copy reads: "Cocaine ... It's a seductive drug. It stimulates, excites the system. And it's deadly." Readers are then provided with the signs of this provocative "fall into the abyss" and a number to call.

All referentials are absorbed by the Miami Vice model. For example, after The CBS Morning News used the "hot Miami area" as a backdrop for a week of broadcasting, one concerned citizen (Barnett, 1986) complained that "anyone watching this network news show would've thought that CBS was reporting on continuing episodes of Miami Vice" (p. 1B). The Miami Herald (Russell, 1986) reported Philip Michael Thomas' attempt at entrepreneurship as an appointment with Irv the Liquidator, who showed up 20 minutes early with Ricardo Tubbs in tow. The rhetorical question followed: "What was this—some twist to a Miami Vice script" (p. 12C)? Indeed, Miami and South Florida have been scripted as "model" simulations operationalizing Baudrillardian theory.

Everything is animated by the script. Perhaps the most graphic example of referent-model dissolution to date has been the case of the Miami cops arrested for murder and cocaine rip-offs (Duffy & Fleischman). Here the model "lives":

> Three macho young Miami cops charged with murder and a fourth charged with racketeering showed up in court Saturday. One blew kisses. One rolled his eyes for photographers. And another saw his picture in the newspaper and smiled. The cops are all in their 20s. They lift weights. Some take steroids, adorn themselves with gold chains and try to impress young women in discos (p. 1A).

The Miami Herald (Year, 1986), in recapitulating the top stories of 1985, provided an interesting layout. A symmetrically composed photograph of these Miami cops served as the intersection for copy beneath the photo which read: "Miami Vice, the Image" which was a description of the television show; while the copy adjacent to the photo read: "Miami Vice, the Real Thing." It is yet another twist of the script. No dialectic exists here where the two traditional poles of the real and representation contract and collapse into one another. This internal collapse of meaning has been characterized by Baudrillard (1983b) as implosion (p. 57). Indeed, out of this internal combustion of meaning, the models rise like the living dead—a precession of simulacra.

Miami Vice is South Florida's script as "the TV show that put South Florida on a lot of maps" (Russell, 1986), made Miami the "hot city of the '80s" (1986), and "provided South Floridians with a unique travelogue" (Cosford, 1985). As Baudrillard (1983b) has indicated, simulation liquidates all referentials, all territory, all substance (p. 2). Thus the map precedes the territory. Miami Vice is the map—the Art Deco simulacrum—that has engendered South Florida (and beyond) as a territory. South Florida is mapped as Miami Vice. The difference between the map and the territory implode as in nuclear fission. The chain reaction of simulation begins and the world is turned inside out as a stratospheric, impervious reification: "the hyperreal" which Baudrillard defines as "the product of an irradiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere" (p. 3).

Miami Vice is hyperreal. To go on a tour of Miami is to see where portions of the show have been shot or to discover that a mural was painted on the side of a building scheduled to be used in Miami Vice (Miami, 1986). The EPCOT Center in Central Florida is hyperreal. Shortly before his death, Walt Disney planned to build the domed, climatically-controlled Experimental Prototype Community of

Tomorrow (Florida, 1984, p. 99). After Disney's death, his successors decided to create an elaborate theme park as a more lucrative financial venture.[3] A few of the Baudrillardian simulacra consist of The Universe of Energy sponsored by Exxon, General Electric's Horizons, The World of Motion by General Motors, and a Journey into the Imagination sponsored by Kodak. Florida is a hyperrealized synthesis of combinatory models: the Miami Vice model, the EPCOT model, the disco model, the condo model, the mall model. The hyperreal is the world as a giant South Florida mall.

This simulated hyperreality characterized by "the vertigo of a flawless world" (Baudrillard, 1983b, p. 63) is South Florida. For example, Weston, near Fort Lauderdale, is an Arvida Community, a hometown of the future which is a subsidiary of Walt Disney Productions. The final page of the brochure (1985) describing Weston, depicts a smiling sunlit nuclear family of four on a lawn of glistening cellophane Easter grass. The small disclaimer beneath the photograph reads: "Photography in this brochure, and in the sales and information displays, may be stock photography used to depict the spirit of lifestyles to be achieved rather than any that may exist." This "model" community will engender other "model" communities. The map, here, has certainly preceded the territory and always already exceeds it.

Miami Vice mapped South Florida and in the process, has animated a host of other models with its artificial effervescence. The show instrumentalizes the very generation of the hyperreal as a miniaturized replica of the rest of the world. As such, Miami Vice functions as a blue-print of the hyperreal—an instruction manual indexing points of implosion and simulation. Miami Vice is not only South Florida hyperrealized or the generator of satellite simulacra (the "'Miami Vice' Look") in other areas of the country. Rather, Miami Vice is

television itself—is life itself—as a kind of docu-drama of cultural meltdown. Baudrillard (1983b) notes, that at this zero degree of culture, "all referentials intermingle their discourses in a circular, Moebian compulsion" (p. 35). Chattering, hysterical referentials are locked in an entropic marathon, always outrun and preceded by the operational negativity of simulation. Simulation provides the coordinates for hyperreal efflorescence—a world of surfaces always already reproduced in the place of a vaporized culture.

According to Baudrillard, hyperreality and simulation owe much to capital:

> [W]hich was the first to feed throughout its history on the destruction of every referential...in order to establish a radical law of equivalence and exchange, the iron law of its power...[Capital] was also the first to liquidate [the reality principle] in the extermination of every use value, of every real equivalence (p. 43).

Indeed, consumed by its own consumption, infinitely reproduced, capital now merely accelerates the play of simulation. This is why Miami Vice "lives" as the hyperrealization of culture. Miami Vice is hyperreal; it is more real than life itself from which it is indistinguishable. One does not need to leave the mall to see Miami Vice or leave Miami Vice to go to the mall. One is always already there in that euphoric hyper-space of surfaces, courtesy of capital, that transfinite funhouse of neon metonymies.

Miami Vice is like a fourth dimensional commodity catalogue or a kind of "through the looking-glass" from which there is no exit. Here, Freud's "uncanny" animates the pages of Vogue and Gentleman's Quarterly which meet at the interstices of Architectural Digest and drive off in a BMW commercial. This is the "twilight zone" of late capitalism as scripted by Armani and Versace. Indeed, Miami Vice is a shimmering, iridescent confluence of commodities. As such, it doubles as

a showcase for the display of sensual commodity surfaces which whisper the pleasures of excess. This is, as Baudrillard points out, "the infinity of capital folded back over its own surface" (p. 35).

Thus, Miami Vice, that presumptious god-head of a commodified world, surrenders itself to a very seductive problematic. Indeed, it would be difficult to find a prime-time television program more blatantly flaunting itself as the refraction of capital and desire. If the postmodern condition is terminal, as Jean Baudrillard seems to think it is, then why not "go for it" and indulge in those tempting, purgatorial surfaces? Miami Vice places these alluring surfaces in relief as the central problematic of politics[4] and pleasure.[5]

Politics and Pleasure: A Difficult Union from the Other Side

In briefly describing the tumultuous affair between politics and pleasure, I do not metaphorize these terms unconsciously. For example, Terry Lovell (1983) notes how, since the 19th century, the capitalist mode of production has been separated into gender-differentiated public and private spheres. Although she specifies ways in which these domains overlap, the ideological maintenance of these categories has resulted in "masculinizing" public life defined by work and politics, and "feminizing" personal life defined by domestic social relationships (pp. 15-16). In relation to pleasure, Lovell makes the provocative assertion that, "it is not only women who are confined in cultural myth and ideology to the private and personal life; so, too, is pleasure. [Pleasure] is not sought, in fiction or reality, in the 'masculine' world of work and politics" (p. 25).

Thus, in metaphorizing pleasure as feminine, I take it up not only as my personal pleasure, but as an ideological, gender-based determination that has been the disturbing "Other" side of politics. Political certitude cannot account

for pleasure's disruptive influence. From the other side, pleasure demands recognition. It is important, then, to render pleasure out of bounds. A politics of pleasure makes an inductive move in this direction as a personal and passionate reflection on seductive political problematics.

A politics of pleasure asserts that public/political and private/personal domains are not mutually exclusive. In the effort to dissolve those boundaries erected between the "feminized" personal sphere and the "masculinized" public sphere, I can "go public" with pleasure, entering the realm of politics from a privatized situation. As Lovell indicates, a similar freedom of movement from the opposite direction should also hold true for men. From the "masculinized" public/political sphere, men should be able to take pleasure "home" through personal reflection. But, no matter which way pleasure moves, moral judgments follow close behind. For a man to articulate a politics of pleasure gets interpreted as an instance of politically insensitive male opportunism; while for a woman to articulate a politics of pleasure gets construed as a brazen instance of disingenuous feminism.

It is indeed a sorry state of affairs when a gender-based division of labor establishes boundaries in the realm of theory, and through these lines of demarcation not only censors urgent issues, but determines who speaks them. I refuse to recognize such boundaries. Pleasure is not the "stay at home" type. Like "the woman question" in Marxist debate, pleasure can no longer be placed last on the agenda or disqualified for a lack of political credentials.

Thus pleasure, as the "flasher" of theory, has been a source of embarrassment for Marxism; as a result, politics, the practitioner of analytical self-denial, has fared much better. Pleasure, of course, is not above reproach and has, on occasion, served to inebriate politics of its critical edge. While French Feminist psychoanalytic theory has done much to encourage a dialogue between this somewhat

antagonistic couple, all too often pleasure has found a more therapeutic outlet in feminine essentialism and romanticism.[6]

Surface Reflections on 'Miami Vice': Pleasure's Provocation of Politics

Thus, lately, pleasure has been on the agenda as the provocateur of politics. Paradoxically, "politically correct" disavowal of pleasure's seductive power has allowed pleasure to take center stage as more than the "naughty" conscience of Marxist theory. For a conscious denial of pleasure doubles over on itself to expose the "cover-up" on a meta-theoretical level. In short, to deny pleasure as instrumental to politics is to admit that a lack exists which pleasure might fill as supplementary: the presence of absence. Through denial of the problem, we are forced to reflect on denial itself and thus, the problem: Why the pleasure derived from the sensual surfaces in Miami Vice is part of the unspeakable, unless couched in the simplistic, pejorative terms of "mass false consciousness."

Here, prudish theoretical certitude is hardly the key that will permit our entry into Baudrillard's reified surface theory of a surface world. Through his arcade of reflections, we will need to plot a course between the nihilism of pouty existentialists (i.e., doom and gloom usually incite self-indulgent angst attacks) and the hedonistic celebration of postmodernists (i.e., uncritical reflection on reflections is Postmodernism's most stylish moment). Perhaps the best tactic is that of the fetishist who equivocates with "yes, I know but all the same" when presented with a pre-fetishized partial object. The fetishist has her cake and eats it too. Thus as a fetishist theorist with political goals and pleasurable aims, I will confront Miami Vice as a hyperreal exemplification of Baudrillard's reified theory. Baudrillard's surface theory is well-armored and thus monolithically impervious to hegemonic fissures. Consequently, I do

not intend to smash the surface in frustration, for that would be an act of theoretical clumsiness risking unpleasure.

However, at another time and place I may choose to argue with the practical logic and orientation of Baudrillard's theory. For instance, the surface he proposes may have a distinctive geography which engenders different models in relief. It is also possible that various types of simulacra function differently or that there are degrees of implosion. Moreover, coming to terms with Baudrillian theory would necessitate somehow resurrecting the social,and revitalizing the mass as something other than a mob. These are large tasks which, for now, fall outside the project at hand.

For now, I will play by Baudrillard's rules of the game and attempt an analysis which reflects critically on the surface. His theory, in which simulation means the death of play in play's total omnipresence (Levin, p. 45), suggests itself to a brazen methodology. One must cruise surfaces in order to play the "played-out" field. The sensual surfaces of Miami Vice mirror, replicate, and instrumentalize the hyperreal decimation of culture, central to Baudrillard's theory. Thus, Miami Vice is a propositional text. This means that it propositions theory and thus runs the risk of rejection,i.e., that it cannot live up to theoretical expectations. But what Miami Vice has to offer, even Baudrillard could not refuse. Insurrectionary vice is an infamous tease for a theory which professes the surface embodiment of vice. Thus, with Baudrillard, I accept the tempting proposition extended by Miami Vice. Hence, I will examine how an inter-play of politics and pleasure can be realized even at the conjunction of capital's refractory surfaces by analyzing how Miami Vice operationalizes Baudrillardian postmodernist theory through its attention to surfaces and style.

SITE OF THE OBSCENE: SCREEN AS SENSUAL BODY

In "The Ecstasy of Communication," Jean Baudrillard (1983a) reflects that "today the scene and mirror no longer exist; instead there is a screen and a network" (pp. 126-27), both indicative of the rational operation of Science. This "'proteinic' era of networks," is characterized by the implosive functionality of television itself which displays a "nonreflecting surface" as "the smooth operational surface of communication" (p. 127). Indeed, television is the mass transit system of the hyperreal in this era of simulation. Luminous networks chart its course as the common carrier of simulacra, travelling to all points and always arriving ahead of schedule. This "model" system evacuates every destination through phospherescent implosion. For television is a simulacra-machine of the highest order. As such, it both documents and is a document of culture's total absorption and reversibility.

Not surprisingly, this process has altered the viewer-screen relation which is now subject to a vertiginous inversion. Baudrillard notes that "with the television image, ... our own body become[s] a control screen" (p. 127). In this era of networks, the body, interpenetrated and absorbed, has been disembodied as so many surface reflections to become the screen. There is no inside or outside.

This is the netherworld of noncommunication where even the boundaries of subjection are liquified. The body as control screen collapses the structural logic of Althusserian (1971) hailing into a kind of hyper-interpellation. Baudrillard's conception of the body as screen(ed) resembles the simulated transference of the interview, rather than Althusser's hailing as practiced by the policeman. The distinction here is between Althusserian embodiment and Baudrillian disembodiment. The body as screen can only hail itself as the affective surface of simulation.

Through simulation, the body becomes atomized as refractive surfaces: a mosaic of reflections. Bodily movements and efforts are displaced into electronic commands, equipped by the screen (Baudrillard, 1983a, pp. 128-29). The screen devours and refracts the body which resurfaces as a reflective mosaic of patterned responses—always already pre-played and re-played. Thus, television's phospherescent mist signals the dissolution of the body in "a new form of schizophrenia" (p. 132).

In this age of cultural involution, all inside and outside is reversible. As a result, the body is subject to the disintegration proper to the schizophrenic, involved in the absolute immediacy and proximity of the world. According to Baudrillard (1983a), for the schizophrenic there is,

> ...too great a proximity of everything, the unclean promiscuity of everything which touches, invests and penetrates without resistance...The schizo is berefit of every scene, open to everything in spite of himself, living in the greatest confusion. He is himself obscene, the obscene prey of the world's obscenity (pp. 132-33).

The schizo knows, but cannot order all those things impinging on him. Stripped raw, he refuses to be taken alive by the electronics of the environment. Thus, the schizophrenic performs a self-implosion and immolation in which he is dispersed (as he disperses himself) across the screen. All is radiated in the blue clarity and visibility of television which absorbs his whole being. Television whispers its strategies of simulation in secret codes, turning them inside out to map the world as hyperreal.

As femme fatale strategist, I speak <u>of</u> the schizo, but never with him or about him. I can only reflect on the surface of his transformation which Baudrillard describes as "a pure screen, a switching center for all the networks of influence" (p. 133). Thus, the body, as operational-affect, can only

answer to the obscene contiguity and tactility of the screen which has now become the sensual body of the proteinic era.

The screen as sensual body appears to be the only body left in this decimated ghost town where "the real itself appears as a large useless body," deserted and condemned (p. 129). In the absence of the body, the screen luxuriates in its own surface simulations as it dissolves boundaries. This is part of the implosive power of the television apparatus[7]: to instantaneously reconstitute sensuality as auto-affection while eradicating boundaries. Television's guilty secret is that in flaunting its own instrumentality, it is exposed as desiring itself. The screen embodies its own sensual surfaces which are "sensualized" by absorbing the body and inscribing a place for it on-screen.

Although this process has been discussed aesthetically as the spectator's subjective identification with the camera or subjective point of view, nothing could be further from the case. For the absence of the body signals that no-body is home. The absence of body is transformed into a screen presence: an operation in which the body is driven up to the screen and dropped off—smothered by the screen's indulgence in its own surfaces. This abolishment of distance, which opens onto sensuous surfaces, is operationalized by Miami Vice.

The Hyper-Presence of 'Miami Vice'

Miami Vice supplements absence with the objective visibility of hyper-presence. The screen is instrumentalized as an overlay of surfaces and thus, appears as itself, as its own best alibi. For instance, in the episode "Glades," (July 5, 1985), the opening music/video montage sequence depicts the Miami ghetto. Static shots of deserted buildings, adult movie arcades, and porno shops are interspersed with tracking shots on either side of the street, exploring the

texture and milieu of this impoverished area. The song on the audio-track provides commentary on the visuals. Thus, the line "Now my girl, you're so young and pretty," signals a cut to a "point of view shot" in which our absence is inscribed in the driver's seat of a car pulled up to the side of the street. To the sultry rhythms of the song, a prostitute tosses her hair and seductively bares her shoulder as she walks up to the car window which doubles as the screen.

The prostitute then knocks on the screen-window, to momentarily embody the place of absence as the site of her proposition. In the surface overlay of screen-window/window-screen, distance is abolished and neutralized. Our absence is embodied in and on the surface as on-screen action addresses the surface, thus collapsing boundaries. As Baudrillard (1983b) puts it, "You no longer watch TV, TV watches you" (p. 53).

This excessive attention to surfaces instrumentalizes moments of hyper-visibility. In its attempt to seduce the disembodied viewer through a surface aesthetics, Miami Vice exposes and implements television's operationality. This acknowledgement and use of the screen is a simulation of the highest order in which tactility and proxemics disperse and congeal on the surface. Indeed, the absent-body is not only impinged upon and propositioned through surfaces, but it is also propelled on the surface to the surface.

For instance, the episode "Florence Italy" (February 14, 1986) concerns the murder of a young prostitute and the eventual discovery of the killer who is a race-car driver in the Miami Grand Prix. An extended car chase sequence constitutes the narrative's end as Crockett and Tubbs pursue the killer's Porsche in their Ferrari. Although the sequence's action is accelerated through the parallel editing of shots between the Ferrari and the Porsche, space once more collapses at the supplementary matrix of the "point of view shot." The body's absent site is

inscribed in the driver's seat of the killer's car. Surfaces are overlaid and the black lettering, "Sanchez Race," is reversed on top of the windshield, reversed again at the top of the screen.

This double reversal signals the slippage between screen-windshield/ windshield-screen. Boundaries evaporate and dissolve on the surface which simulates mobility. The absent-body is embodied on-screen as a projectile locked into and onto a trajectory of screen vectors.

The tension of the car chase increases through shifts between long shots and "point of view shots." It becomes obvious that the killer cannot escape, for his only escape route, which is down an alley, is blocked by police cars. Here inside/outside reversibility is underscored. A close-up of the windshield from outside the car indicates space preceding the windshield-screen surface. A reverse "point of view shot" from inside the car, behind the windshield-screen follows. The audio-track registers a dull thud.

The Porsche has crashed into a wall but this suicide scene has been omitted and thus functions as the absent center: the empty pivotal point for preceding and proceeding space which locates reversibility at the implosion of windshield-screen/screen-windshield. Dissolution and abolition of distance is inaugurated by the dull thud and the sudden extreme close-up of a mottled pattern of the wall's surface on the windshield, on the screen. This shot, which fills the screen, is held in freeze frame as the sound of shattering glass echoes over the frozen shot. Indeed, the screen even has the power to reveal the obscene texture of simulated death.

Thus, technique is not a productive force but rather a medium which continues where the body leaves off. The surface of Miami Vice is sensualized through a proteinics realized in the plasticity of the medium itself. Despite

the body, without the body, and beyond the body, the surface engages in an auto-performance which takes over the body. This divestment and reinvestment of the body onto the screen surface raises the political problematic of a medium which is nourished and sensualized through the death of the real.

Yet, at the same time that the screen takes over the body, the body is overtaken. To be overtaken is to surrender, to fall apart, to give in. Thus, pleasure arrives on the screen which is the site where the body is abandoned and given over to hyper-affects: an auto-eroticism of self-serving simulations. Baudrillard (1983c) notes that while "I desire you" is obscene, "you please me" is more subtle articulating the other as the subject of pleasure (p. 45). And if the "you" and the "me" are one in the same simulations which "please," does this mean that masturbatory indulgence in surfaces is bad? Not necessarily. While this implosion of politics and pleasure may not be wholly satisfactory, privileging one term over the other is no guarantee of total satisfaction either. Thus, we might do well to examine style in Miami Vice; for style, that flirtatious embellishment, dances on the surface to perhaps resist the very terms of both totalizations.

STYLISTIC EXCESS: VICE OR VIRTUE, OR THE VIRTUES OF VICE

Miami Vice, more so than any other prime-time television program, has introduced the term "postmodern" into the common idiom as descriptive of the show's opulent mise-en-scene and flambuoyant visual style. As a result, most popular accounts of Miami Vice note the subordination of the narrative to the show's style (Grossberger, 1986; Mitchell, 1986; Pollan, 1985; Sonsky, 1986). Style is conceived of as both a "cheap trick" only possible at the narrative's

expense and as a visual exercise in postmodernist aesthetics. Thus, style in Miami Vice is described in glowing terms as a surface embellishment which, nonetheless, substitutes for a substantial narrative.

For instance, Michael Pollan (1985) registers moral indignation when comparing Hill Street Blues to Miami Vice. Pollan notes that while Hill Street was didactic about ethics, Vice "reserves its didacticism for the issue[s] of style [which is] right at the center of the show" (p. 27). According to Pollan, style is the immoral, hollow center of Miami Vice (pp. 27-28). Couched in these terms, stylistic excess in Miami Vice not only scandalously exceeds the narrative to which, by all ethical standards, it should be subordinate; but, style has the audacity to stand in the center, in place of the narrative. Thus, it appears that style is sanctioned only in an ideal union with narrative which enforces style's domestication. However, style is rendered problematic the moment that it divorces itself from narrative, while continuing to draw sustenance from narrative absence. In a scandalous moment of narcissism, style has the nerve to perform for the sake of itself.

This is indeed a moral outrage to Pollan who views Miami Vice as failing to live up to those ethical standards which unite style and narrative in Hill Street Blues. Thus, according to Pollan's formulations, Miami Vice emerges as self-indulgent and, consequently, as an immoral text. But the immorality may lie in Pollan's ethical standards which are informed by Modernist, rather than Postmodernist aesthetics. As a commodity catalogue of surfaces informed by late capitalism, Miami Vice makes no moral pretense about its narrative vacuuity or lack of depth: a stylish surface is all there is. In this sense, "postmodern" is a term which does much more than describe the Art Deco, pastel mise-en-scene of Miami Vice. Rather, the term operationalizes Miami Vice as an exemplification

of Baudrillardian postmodernist theory.

As a result, in Miami Vice, style appears in the show's surface. The manipulation of surface style (a modulation of difference) becomes a stylish surface which stands in the narrative's place, a place now berefit of all substance. Here, style is simulation's hieroglyph which functions as an indexical sign that the narrative is a terminal case. Similar to the "vampiric" simulacra which feed off the carrion of a dead culture, so style draws its nourishment from the death throes of an exhausted narrative. The narrative is no longer essential to justify style's capricious excesses; rather, style, in all its dazzling excess, precedes the narrative announcing the narrative's evaporation. Perfectly at home in the flawless world of Baudrillardian simulation, style becomes an iridescent flourish of the hyperreal as a sign that hyperreality is flourishing.

Pleasure and Politics: Living in Sin with Style

As concerned surveyor of surfaces, politics haunts the charred site of narrative, which is enveloped in stylish luminousity. The accusation of "all style and no substance" is indicative of the bad faith of a stylish politics. Style, that transcient flirt, refuses to be faithful to politics and instead, registers protest by dressing up for the occasion. After all, if nothing exists below the surface, then style can at least play at revolution on the surface. Thus style, that "cheap trick," provides politics with a small consolation; yet, style may be more empowering than it at first appears. For in the highly commodified, reified world of late capitalism where all cultural objects and experiences are pre-fetishized and vacuum-packed, style may provide a surface site for the cohabitation of politics and pleasure.

For example, Lawrence Grossberg (1984) discusses the emancipatory potential of rock and roll in the creation of temporary identities. He suggests that style, in fetishizing its own surface, undermines the problem of mediation through an "image density" (a hyperreality all its own) that both projects and denies identity. According to Grossberg:

> Style constantly displaces itself onto an other, but that other is merely another style, an attitude. Style makes the surface of life into the site of temporary investments and manipulations, without ever suggesting that there is a necessarily privileged agency behind them (p. 106).

Here, Grossberg is referring specifically to the body of youth culture inserted within the rock and roll apparatus. This is a seductive analysis which works with the simulacrum to push it to its limits. Grossberg's conception of style plays on and with the surface. In its refusal to express a deeper meaning, style takes narcissistic pleasure in itself as the temporary flux of identities on the surface (the body). However, the limits may not have been reached yet, and this seductive analysis may be ripe for further seduction from vice. For in Miami Vice, style fetishizes its own surface which is, in turn, fetishized by the screen surface. This is an instance in which style is not merely on the surface, but always already of and in the surface.

In this sense, style is no longer the transcient flirt or a narrative subordinate; rather, style interfaces with the surface in an exhibitionistic display. The screen-surface and style are interwoven in a tight complicitous mesh of interlaced scanning. Prismatic light rays are always in process. Although style is dependent on the weave of screen coordinates, it stages its protean appearance-as-disappearance with the surface. Indeed in Miami Vice, style and surface form a kinetic, but sensual liaison. Through the

double fetishization of style's own surface with the surface as style, the TV-simulacrum is pushed to its limits in the activation of sensual surfaces folding onto and into each other. This excessive stylistic indulgence is operationalized in Miami Vice through the deployment of object-field relations.

Sensual Surfaces: Stylistic Excess in 'Miami Vice'

In Miami Vice, stylistic excess is constituted by a fetishistic doubling of sensual surfaces which fold onto each other in the relation of objects to field. The object-to-field relation is subject to the continuous ebb and flow of scanning which means that this relation is always in flux, always changing. Thus, objects to field melt into each other. What was the field, momentarily materializes as an object; in another instant, object disperses into field. In order to activate the sensual plasticity of the screen surface, this rhythmic appearance-as-disappearance between objects and field must fluctuate in the supplementary play of presence and absence. Herbert Zettl (1973) notes this protean electronics of the screen surface:

> Because the mosaic dots of the television screen light up only temporarily and change their brightness according to how hard they are hit by the electron beam, the television image is never complete. While some of the dots are activated by the electron beam, others are rapidly decaying (p. 253).

In this sense, the surface style of specific objects, individually fetishized, open into a perpetually dispersed pattern as the on-screen surface style, labelled appropriately "the 'Miami Vice' look."

In arguing for this double sense of style in the fetishistic surface relations of object to field, it would be worthwhile to examine some of the specific objects which function as field constituents. In Miami Vice, style

as its own self-serving surface appears in both the confluence of commodities,i.e., Ferraris, Porsches, Armani and Versace fashions, Rolex watches, and in the dazzling visual style typified by vertiginous camera angles, superimpositions, slow dissolves and long takes which showcase these commodities. Commodities are placed in relief through the visual style, dispersed as so much refractive filigree constituting the richly embroidered field, the stylish on-screen surface of Miami Vice. In this sense, style is self-fetishizing as a commodity-surface which is also complicit in creating a stylish (screen)surface. This surface style, in turn, fetishizes itself as the visually performative field of/for sensuous commodities.

While Marx's ventriloquist-dummy commodities gossiped about their self-worth, their value, these sleek commodities reflect confidence in their allure, whispering the pleasures of surface indulgence. While Marx's dummy-commodities were animated by the ventriloquism of the economic base, these sensuous commodities speak for themselves through the visual style of the medium. Energized by the electronic plasticity of the medium, style folds over to cushion the commodities as if in a showcase.

This showcase is of and in the surface style of the show. Surface style luminizes commodity-surfaces, displaying them in all their translucent availability as the refraction of capital and desire. This screen illusion of transparency offers a great deal: the conjunction of pleasure and politics realized through critical reflection on the commodity. For each movement of this reflective course has drawn us closer to the surface modulated as obscene screen, proteinic scanner, and now as commodity showcase. It is here at the refraction of capital and desire that we must press our noses to the showcase and examine the display: the goodies under the glass.

MALE DISPLAY: THE GOODIES UNDER THE GLASS

The orchestrated display of commodities known as Miami Vice presents a vast array of visual and aural goodies for our sensual indulgence. These desserts, almost too rich, too excessive for consumption seem to rotate under the glass in an electronic procession of saturated pastels and mirrored surfaces. This display, which tips the scales in the direction of pleasure at the expense of politics, is not so much under the glass as of the glass. Indeed, the smooth, convex surface of the television screen dissolves all tantalizing objects into its grid, giving rise to the affect of simulation.

In Miami Vice this affective rise is the climax enacted by the television apparatus itself which places style at the center. And, at this very center of style, is the music/video sequence: always awaited with great anticipation and then savored as it unfolds, a dazzling auto-performance of movement set in/to visual and musical rhythms. Typically, that delicacy which moves to the beat and asks to be savored is the male body: the stylish male body of Don Johnson.

This super-cool display of male erotics might at first appear to provide the conditions for a politically correct denial of desire—that is, self-denial. After all, Johnson's body has been reified to the extreme —his "look" and style, simulated and modeled in discos everywhere. But the remedy for this extremely commodified version of the male body is not to embrace the political good faith of the body of an Alan Alda or Phil Donahue. These antidotes may neutralize desire, but at the expense of a surface pleasure which Johnson's body provides. Above all, critical reflection on the surface must be honest and direct, and thus nakedly confront pleasure on its own terms. The terms of confrontation with Don Johnson's body as object of critical reflection is

perhaps best situated in the "You Belong to the City" music/video sequence from the episode "The Prodigal Son"(September 26, 1985). In this music/video sequence, the male body (as a goodie of and in the glass) is a moving cipher of style.

Don Johnson's Body: A Cipher of Style

It is important here to reflect, for a moment, on Johnson's body as a cipher of style. Not surprisingly, the Johnson/Crockett "look" constitutes an implosive style. According to Johnson (Price, 1986),the trademark beard stubble was the product of, "some drunken weekend when I hadn't shaved and spent several days in bed. I got up and looked in the mirror, and I really liked what I saw. That's how the look was born" (p. 171). In an extended extrapolation on "rumpled chic" as characteristic of Crockett's cool, impudent air, Johnson states:

> Crockett has what it takes and he doesn't give a damn. He gets out of bed, opens the closet door and, while he makes a phone call, throws on a mint-green T-shirt he's found lying in the corner of the closet and a peach jacket that was next to it. As he's talking on the phone, he casually looks in the mirror and smiles. The colors work perfectly (p. 171).

Indeed, even as Johnson speaks, he articulates his body as a surface reflection imbricated in a mirror relation: the unashamed narcissistic product of casual orchestration and naturalized artifice. This stylish incongruity which mixes a long-john top under a seven-hundred dollar jacket is, for Johnson, "absurd," but he adds: "it's comfortable, accessible and non-threatening. It's style" (p. 171). So speaks Baudrillardian postmodernism out of the mouths of simulacra. Johnson speaks his own implosive simulation—an interpreter is not necessary.

However, in order to "have my cake and eat it too," I must add that Johnson's "look" bears the traces of casual sex (which is, of course, never casual enough). This "rumpled chic" articulates the careless scramble to dress after a particularly invigorating sexual encounter—or, to put it another way—dressing as if for "sex on the run." Thus, Johnson's body, as the surface embodiment of style, announces a casual pleasure in and of the male body for its own sake which is, no less, to give pleasure. Sex is deterritorialized, for it is possible almost anywhere, at any time.

Johnson's style, inseparable from his body, is activated as the fetishized center of the "You Belong to the City" music/video sequence, halting the narrative so that viewers can relish the pleasure of the display. Indeed, here the male body is embedded in the surface mise-en-scene of the city which is the visually stylized surface in/of the screen surface. As such, Johnson's body is a signifier of itself which centralizes and orchestrates all the action (including music and camera movement/angles) on the surface.

The body, as fetishized center, functions as the precondition for the veiling and unveiling of the television-apparatus' power. Man's stage is the city, and the movement of the city pivots around the male body, even as the male body moves to the music. Here it is necessary to address the politically obvious structuration of this mise-en-scene. For instance, Paul Willemen (1981) notes in reference to males in the films of Anthony Mann that, "The viewer's experience is predicated on the pleasure of seeing the male 'exist' (that is walk, move, ride, fight) in or through cityscapes, landscapes or, more abstractly, history" (p. 16). This is the case here, however, with reservations.

Even though Johnson's body is the locus of movement, his traversal of the city is a journey to nowhere. His walk is, in fact, a dance <u>to</u> the camera and

to the music: the male body's destination is in/of the performative sensuality of the technological apparatus (Slack, 1985) itself which includes those larger networks of the television, fashion, and record industries. As an affect of simulation, everywhere Don Johnson walks becomes a music/video, becomes Miami Vice or Miami with the tempting promise of vice. His cool simulacral body quite literally "makes the scene," through seductive fabrications of attitude and place. This may account for Johnson's style as propositional not only for multiple identifications/desires (i.e., from the tarnished "Golden Boy" in US magazine to the James Dean-type young man in Ladies' Home Journal to the cool operator in Rolling Stone) but as the very terms for male propositional strategies as practiced in singles' bars.

Moreover, Johnson's physical attitude is that of the ultimate poseur. Where he stands, he strikes poses not as threats but as seductive invitations to-be-looked-at and to be fetishized--a "feminized" position invested with the male power to command the city for his staging as the white, illuminated fetish. Early in the music/video sequence, headlights illuminate Johnson's body as he is surrounded by cars while crossing the street. Later, as Johnson attempts to hail a taxi, a complex dissolve (as the prolongation of visual pleasure) places his body as the apex of two sets of headlights: the male body encircled and illuminated as gleaming fetish object.

Indeed, the song "You Belong to the City" is a song of double possession, for the city owns Johnson as Johnson owns the city. A brief political intercession reveals that the "feminized," fetishized male body in this scene has a totally different positionality than would a "masculinized," fetishized female body. To imagine the cultural stereotype of the "tough chick," quickly lends itself to a different scenario. For example, were a street-wise woman to cross the

street to be met by male hecklers propositioning her, she would, perhaps give them the "fuck you" signal and continue walking while constantly surveying street action. Other possible scenarios might include the woman almost running down the street, ignoring the hecklers, or the woman pretending she has a destination, signified by her looking at her watch. The city and the male body are thus conflated, packaged, and elevated as a stylish "package deal"—a cool freedom of movement available to men and desired by women.

Thus, the rhythms of the city, both visual and musical, dress the male body in a surface embodiment of style—a cool, city style recapitulated through the body's movement to the beat. In this sense, the male body "wholes" the music/video sequence, while the male body is simultaneously the terms for the sequence's transparent fragments. These transparent fragments provide the coordinates for the mapping (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983) of the male body as a commodity set in style.

Transparent Desires: Mapping the Male Body

It could be argued that the phrase "transparent desires" speaks for itself in articulating the cool, immediate visibility of Johnson's commodified allure. He walks through the music/video sequence wrapped in the cellophane-packaging of dissolves which prolong the pleasure of the walk. As a cool hieroglyph relayed and fetishized between and within dissolves, the inaccessibility of Johnson's body is always maintained. For instance, my girlfriend Debbie succinctly stated Johnson's appeal as "too cool." And, indeed, this is the case. For to be "too cool" relies on the constant distancing and forestalling of desire.

Johnson's body is only accessible provisionally through the song "You

Belong to the City" in which the "You" offers the terms for a private appropriation translated against this cool, distanced seduction. As Daniel Charles (1980) notes, "Listening is a means of touching at a distance...[W]e need only remember that in the West the privacy of one's inner life has always been linked to the turning inward of the ear" (p. 194). Indeed, the romantic lyrics from "You Belong to the City" do not anchor Johnson's body, but sell it and send it to us. According to Regis Durand (1977): "There is no such thing as a neutral voice, a voice without desire, a voice that does not desire me" (p. 103). The ecstasy of possession is promised through the lyrical lure of the generalizable "You" who is the "Me" that reads and uses the music/video sequence in a variety of different ways. Thus, while we are invited to "touch" through the music, we can only "look" through the glass.

Only there in the glass, subject to the teasing veiling and unveiling of dissolves, can the male body be admired and fetishized as the cool, transparent product of simulation. Baudrillard (1981a) makes the point that this type of "functional perfection exercises a cold seduction" (p. 188). Johnson's body as "too cool" points in the direction of pleasure as death found in the cold, electronic, operational surface of the television apparatus. "Decked out" in a cool style, death haunts the surface animation of simulacra.

Thus, television as one instance of "communicational, contractual, and motivational obscenity" (Baudrillard, 1983a, p. 131), presents the all-too-visible transparence of the male body as a cold pleasure of/in the surface. Although the song may increase proximity, music too is a product of the rock and roll apparatus tied into the communication network of which television, and thus music/video, is a part. Daniel Charles (1980) reminds us that, "music is 'alive' to the extent to which it participates in the <u>life of</u>

machines" (p. 194). But, apparently, even though Don Johnson's cool style is the electronic orchestration of pleasure as death, many women prefer to watch Johnson's "superficial" auto-performance to the strained performance of 'real' men in 'real' singles' bars. The reason for this personal investment in non-communicational surface pleasures may reside in the stylistic virtuousity of the medium itself.

The Body of 'Vice': The Narcissistic Journey of A Surface Style

Indeed in the music/video sequence, the course travelled by the male body can be mapped as the narcissistic journey of Miami Vice's surface style. As Deleuze and Guattari (1983) note, "A map is a matter of performance" (p. 26) which, in this case, refers to a stylish auto-performance. Dissolves, as instances of stylistic excess, function as transparent fragments, drifting and converging over Johnson's body. His body, set in style, provides the intersection which momentarily "gathers" transparent overlays. As in a palimpsest (Spivak, 1976, p. lxxv) to which there is no original, the ephemeral "substance" of transparencies clothe the male body in dissolves. In terms of the apparatus, Johnson's body is dressed for excess, and thus functions as the medium's "pre-text" for a surface-inscribed stylistic indulgence.

The apparatus is the most obvious tease which sensualizes Johnson's body through the transparent layering of the screen-surface. For instance, Johnson crosses the street a second time to the right, which gives rise to a dissolve. The headlights and his movement away from the camera linger momentarily, superimposed over the proceeding shot in which he moves toward the camera. Thus, we see Johnson coming and going as a visual dressing and undressing of movement—his movement, telescoped by the apparatus and performed in the plasticity of the

medium. Later, Johnson's body is the intersection of an elaborate pan and dissolve which erases and transports him from hailing a taxi in the street to posing beneath a street-lamp on the sidewalk. Dissolves inform the music/video sequence in a constant staging of the appearance-as-disappearance of the male body, dressed and undressed by the apparatus.

This "cool" erotic staging of the medium's prowess functions as a visual teasing, coordinated with the constant lure of the song: a conflation of the city, the "You," and Don Johnson. Murray Schafer (1977) observes that "the ear, unlike the eye, cannot be closed at will and can be taken at any time for an erotic orifice: Listening to the sounds of music, is like the tongue of a lover in your ear" (p. 12). Indeed, the music functions stylistically as a sensuous relay for the body—its movement and thus, its orchestrated display. This display bears some relationship to the classical Hollywood musical of mainstream cinema which has "showcased" the male body as erotic object.[8] According to Steve Neale (1983): "Instances of 'feminization' occur in the musical [as] the only genre in which the male body has been unashamedly put on display...in any consistent way" (p. 15).

Thus, throughout Johnson's carefully orchestrated traversal of the surface, the "walking rhythm" of "You Belong to the City" articulates the male body to street action, only to be problematized by the visuals, coded for "femininity." For instance, as Johnson initially crosses the street to the beat of the music, his body is solicited. His walk down the block is a choreographed stride in which his body is modeled as if on a runway, bathed in blue light. In mid-sequence, Johnson poses beneath a street-lamp: perfect, flawless, static. "Just like a dream," simulation is the real which, as Baudrillard (1983b) notes, "captures every dream even before it takes on the

appearance of a dream" (p. 150). The extended close-up of Johnson's chiseled features, molded by light and shadow, appears to recapitulate the preceding close-ups of female mannequins in a stylistic modulation of difference: He is glossy; they are garish.

Johnson continues his journey from screen-left to screen-right. As he walks down the street past department store windows, his silhouette is momentarily framed in relief as a male counter-part to a silhouetted female mannequin: a convergence of commodities inscribed in the glass of the storefront. Here the outside and the inside of the glass is the reversible showcase for both products. The repeated refrain, "You belong" and a dissolve, signal the conclusion of the sequence. Indeed, Johnson's body "belongs" as a double surface inscription in itself and in the surface. An aerial shot sets his body in the style of the screen-surface. The song ends as Johnson's body moves to the top of the frame and melts into the concrete surface of the city, intersected by cast shadows. He dissolves into the electronic matrices of the grid through a dissolve.

REFLECTING ON SURFACES: IN AND OF THEMSELVES

The dissolve signals our return to the beginning of our reflective course through Baudrillard's surface world, operationalized in Miami Vice. By examining this seductive surface from different angles, we discover what we always knew: that the territory was already mapped as hyperreal. Miami Vice and Miami provided implosive points of simulation long before I got there and Don Johnson's body was exhausted long before I came to it. Yet, this quest has not been all in vain.

Baudrillard's reified surface theory of a surface world has provided the conditions for reflection on those seductive commodity surfaces informed by late capitalism. However, it may not be too late and the postmodern condition may not be terminal. There is a crucial difference between the fatal strategist and the femme fatale strategist. This not only involves sexual difference, but the impertinent suggestion that pleasure, politics and style may provide some liberating points of intersection on the surface. Gloomy, fatal reflections must contend with the disruptive insistence on pleasure: a provocative interruption. Things may not be so bad after all if we invite disturbing concepts to play the "played-out" field.

Indeed, the sensual surfaces of Miami Vice could be one starting point in re-mapping non-virginal territory. Cruising the surface has proven productive, not in the investment and circulation of meaning like capital (that would've been a bad investment, perhaps yielding a swamp in South Florida rather than a momentary attempt at pleasure). But rather, by remaining on and at the surface, according to Baudrillard's rules, we have discovered that the surface pleasures which style provides are multiple and interesting in and of themselves. There is a politics of refusal in not forcing things to mean or fit into pre-established paradigms.

To implicate oneself in "guilty" pleasures and then fully engage them is an honest attempt to touch, if even from a distance. Don Johnson's body may serve no other function than to give pleasure. And music, according to Daniel Charles (1980) may be nothing more than "the ordinary...which makes one's skin shiver...which overwhelms the body and makes one dance" as pure signals "nothing other than themselves [defined through] maximum simplicity" (p. 198). These sensual pleasures in and of themselves cast a new light on

those commodity theories informed by ideological excavations for meaning which, in the process of the dig, attempt to bury sensual pleasures as the repressed of politics. Although my analysis slides to the side of pleasure, the "other" in need of defense, it is perhaps not impossible to be sensually engaged and critical of the engagement at the same time. In fact, critically speaking, a defense of pleasure is, in itself, a political act in that it articulates the repressed to the surface. We are not only made conscious of the reification of surfaces but our own theoretical/academic reifications in relation to those surfaces.

TOWARDS A PLEASURE WITHOUT EXCUSES AND A POLITICS WHICH REQUIRE NONE

When pleasure is articulated to the surface for our thoughtful consideration, pleasure becomes part of the process of critical reflection, and thus political engagement. There is a false binarism in conceptualizing politics and pleasure as forever divorced from each other, occupying antagonistic camps. The split between politics and pleasure compells us to choose, and thus rehearses those either/or binary terms, entrapping us from all angles: the signifier/signified of linguistics, the mind/body dualism of philosophy, the private/public spheres of capitalism and the male/female differences of enculturation. How limited experience would be were it based on the false binarisms of theoretical paradigms. Luckily, this isn't the case. Experience, of which pleasure is a part, always out-runs theory. Pleasure, in excess of analysis, was "born to run" and thus exceeds "neat" paradigms. If politics chooses to represent itself as a neat, unyielding paradigm, then pleasure will run it down.

However, if pleasure and politics broach the divide to work together

in process, this may be productive for a relentless analysis. In this type of analysis, pleasure and politics would run together in high-key, traversing surfaces. Politics would be sensualized and pleasure would be reflective. For a relentless analysis pushes through limits. By refusing entrapment, it is always out of bounds. A relentless analysis doesn't relent; it offers no apologies and it doesn't give up, give out, or give in. It always discovers new avenues of approach.

Indeed, a relentless analysis is never satisfied, for it is always after its quarry, pushing limits. This is the stuff a truly passionate politics is made of. So, if my analysis of surface pleasures has out-run my politics, I have no excuses. For I look towards a pleasure without excuses and a politics which require none.

NOTES

[1]"Postmodernism" is, indeed, an elusive term. However, it can be designated as a body of work informed by the material conditions of our historical epoch, separating it from Modernism. In this sense, Postmodernism is both an academic category as a multi-disciplinary aesthetics and a historically "lived" condition informed by late capitalism. The term also implies various practices, styles and strategies of resistance which can and do combine any of the above. For discussions of Postmodernism, see Eagleton (1985), Fekete (1984), Foster (1983), Grossberg (1982, 1983), Harari (1979), Jameson (1984), Latimer (1984), Levin and Kroker (1984), and Lyotard (1984).

[2]For a far more thorough and developed rendering of Jean Baudrillard's intellectual history, see Chen (1985).

[3]It is significant to note that Baudrillard (1983a) views Disneyland as a "model" of simulation (pp. 23-26).

[4]I regard politics to mean the theory and practice of an ideology or ideologies. Thus, a political practice either involves hegemony in the articulation of systems of representation in order to win and shape consent or in the use of physical force. There is no politics which is outside of or lacks various practices and/or ideologies. This means that Marxism, in all its varieties, is a political theory and practice.

The particular types of Marxist politics that I find problematic are those which either use economic determinism (privileging the base) or use structural determinism (privileging the functions of super-structural forms). Both types of determinisms negate the phenomenological dimension of lived experience which must be considered in any critique of cultural artifacts.

[5]Pleasure is another difficult term to define. One could be facetious and say that if you need to ask about it, you haven't experienced it. Unfortunately, often a pleasurable experience goes unnoticed when it's happening and only gets reflected upon later in its absence. In an introductory note to Roland Barthes' The Pleasure of the Text, Richard Howard (p. vi) remarks that pleasure is a state, bliss (jouissance) an action, and both of them are unspeakable in our culture. Hence, this gives rise to a personal/privatized notion of pleasure whose domain of expression has been confined to the domestic sphere or to experiences defined by intimate social relationships.

However, I think that pleasure is more than a confined state and has to do with intense engagement (as interrelationship, intercourse, or meta-reflection). For me, pleasure involves active moments of sensual excitation and satiation in response to desirable stimuli from the environment. As such, pleasure entails singular or multiple excitations and satiations that can never be wholly satisfied (i.e., if everything gave pleasure, then nothing would). Obviously, what pleasure is and those things which induce or activate it vary from person to person and thus, from experience to experience. One thing is for sure, people usually want to savor pleasure because it never seems to come often enough.

[6]For works which historicize and contextualize French Feminist psychoanalytic theory, see Duchen (1986), Marks (1980), and Turkle (1978). For examples of French Feminist psychoanalytic theory, see Gallop (1982) and Irigaray (1985, 1985a), and for a useful critique of this approach and position, see Huston (1979) and Lyon (1979).

[7]The term "apparatus" has a complex history within a variety of theoretical domains. For example, Louis Althusser (1971) locates one state apparatus and a plurality of ideological state apparatuses (of which communications is one) on two separate super-structural levels. Michel Foucault (1980), in developing his "micro-physics of power," fissures this structural-functional notion of the apparatus as "the system of relations" between "a heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions" (p. 194).

Foucault's definition establishes "apparatus" as a discursive/material network constituted by a nexus of interrelationships. But in order to specify the functions and systematicity of various types of apparatuses (like the "technological apparatus"), Jennifer Daryl Slack (1985, p. 24) notes that we need to turn to Foucault's notion of an "ascending analysis" which starts from [apparatuses'] "infintesimal mechanisms, each which have their own history, their own trajectory and their own techniques and tactics" (Foucault, 1980, p. 99).

Film theory has done this by elaborating a notion of the cinematic apparatus as an ensemble of specific mechanisms which are historical and strategic, such as Renaissance perspective, depth of field, the instrumental base, the photo-chemical process, conditions of reception, distribution, exhibition and the constitution of spectator subjectivity. See Baudry (1976, 1977), Comolli (1974/75), and de Lauretis and Heath (1980).

A television apparatus, then, would not only partake in the large network as part of a plural system of discursive, socio-cultural, representational and institutional relations, but also get defined in its specificity through those

historical and strategic mechanisms of its instrumentality (video tape, electron beam, screen grid, etc.), its designation as a home appliance (a "commonplace object," giving us "something" for "nothing"), and in its intimate proxemics and conditions of reception in the home (which relate to notions of televisual pleasures as personal/privatized/"feminized").

[8]Neale's connection between male erotic display and the musical lends itself well to my discussion of Don Johnson's traversal of the city in the music/video sequence. This sequence can be situated in relation to the extended opening sequence in Saturday Night Fever (1977) in which John Travolta walks through the city to "Staying Alive," and the concluding sequence in Staying Alive (1983) depicting Travolta's "strut" past Times Square to the song. Interestingly, not only is Travolta's body fragmented, but this city-walk sequence is stylized, relying on a cross-screen filter to produce a starburst effect on the lights. Travolta ends his journey in freeze-frame followed by a dissolve of his body on/into the screen surface.

The opening sequence from American Gigolo (1980) also presents male display and sensuality in relation to movement. Here, to the song "Call Me," Richard Gere drives through Malibu, stopping at an exclusive men's clothing store to admire his reflection in a three-way mirror and later saying goodnight to an elderly female customer. From these music/video type sequences, one could argue for a notion of male display as the sensualization of movement (in dancing, walking, driving) linked to a romanticized notion of male freedom of movement within the public domain.

This paper was first delivered at the 36th Annual Conference of the International Communication Association in Chicago, May 1986. I am indebted to Larry Grossberg, Diana Saco, and David Wehner for providing me with the support and experiences which left their mark here.

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